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MARX AND GANDHI WERE LIBERALS

— FEMINISM AND THE “RADICAL” LEFT

by Andrea Dworkin

Dedicated to the memory of Virginia Woolf

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1. The Problem

They [feminists] were fighting the same enemy that you are fighting and for the same reasons. They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you were fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state. And abroad the monster has come more openly to the surface. There is no mistaking him there. He has widened his scope. He is interfering now with your liberty; he is dictating how you shall live; he is making distinctions not merely between the sexes, but between the races. You are feeling in your own persons what your mothers felt when they were shut out, when they were shut up, because they were women. Now you are being shut out, you are being shut up, because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion. The whole iniquity of dictatorship, whether in Oxford or Cambridge, in Whitehall or Downing Street, against Jews or against women, in England or in Germany, in Italy or in Spain, is now apparent to you.

Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*

"Homes are the real places of the women who are now compelling men to be idle. It is time the Government insisted upon employers giving work to more men, thus enabling them to marry the women they cannot now approach." Place beside it another quotation. "There are two worlds in the life of the nation, the world of men and the world of women. Nature has done well to entrust the man with the care of his family and the nation. The woman's world is her family, her husband, her children, and her home." One is written in English, the other in German. But where is the difference? Are they not both saying the same thing? Are they not both the voices of Dictators, whether they speak English or German, and are we not all agreed that the Dictator when we meet him abroad is a very dangerous as well as a very ugly animal? And he is here among us, raising his ugly head, spitting his poison in the heart of England. Is it not from this egg, to quote Mr Wells again, that "the practical obliteration of [our] freedom by Fascists or Nazis" will spring? And is not the woman who has

to breathe that poison and to fight that insect, secretly and without arms fighting the Fascist or Nazi as surely as those who fight him with arms? And must not that fight wear down her strength and exhaust her spirit? Should we not help her to crush him in our own country before we ask her to help us to crush him abroad? And what right have we, Sir, to trumpet our ideals of freedom and justice to other countries when we can shake out from our most respectable newspapers any day of the week eggs like these?

Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*

It is the figure of a man, some say, others deny, that he is Man himself, the quintessence of virility, the perfect type of which all the others are imperfect adumbrations. He is a man certainly. His eyes are glazed; his eyes glare. His body, which is braced in an unnatural position, is tightly cased in a uniform. Upon the breast of that uniform are sewn several medals and other mystic symbols. His hand is upon a sword. He is called in German and Italian Fuhrer or Duce; in our own language Tyrant or Dictator. And behind him lie ruined houses and dead bodies – men, women, and children... It suggests a connection and for us a very important connection. It suggests that the public and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other. It suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure but are ourselves that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure.

Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*

Three Guineas was published in June 1938. It is the product of a very odd mind and, I think, of a very odd state of mind. It was intended as a continuation of *A Room of One's Own*, but it was written in a far less persuasive, a far less playful mood. It was a protest against oppression, a genuine protest denouncing real evils and, to the converted, Virginia did not preach in vain. A great many women wrote to express their enthusiastic approval; but her close friends were silent, and if not silent, critical. Vita did not like it, and Maynard Keynes was both angry and contemptuous, it was, he declared, a silly argument and not very well written. What really seemed wrong with the book

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— and I am speaking here of my own reactions at the time — was the attempt to involve a discussion of women's rights with the far more agonising and immediate question of what we were to do in order to meet the ever-growing menace of Fascism and war. The connection between the two questions seemed tenuous and the positive suggestions wholly inadequate.

Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*

I have quoted at some length from Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* because it is unlikely that those on the Left who consider the causes of war and act to end it know the book. It was maligned as silly drivel by Leftists in 1938 and today it is, let us be polite, ignored by most political people.

In 1938, Virginia Woolf was a prominent (though endlessly condescended to) artist of the first magnitude. Even though her formal preoccupations allied her with James Joyce, as a woman she was placed without effort at the end of a very short list: the Brontë sisters, Austen, the two Georges, Woolf. Even though her political preoccupations entitled her to recognition as an original mind, as a serious revolutionary thinker, both the quality and the content of her analysis went ignored. In 1938 Woolf was 3 years away from her last conscientious act, suicide, the last resort of many a prophet without any real community.

Three Guineas is the first feminist analysis of what war is and how to stop it. Woolf is relentless in her insistence that war is a male activity — not only because men make war, but because war is a direct extension of masculine values and behavior. She outlines, relentlessly, the total exclusion of women from all the institutions of decision-making and power in a patriarchy. She describes what *machismo* is (though she did not use the word), and how its public manifestation in war-making is a somber accurate reflection of its presence in what she calls "the private house," the house where men rule and women serve. She shows how the heterosexual man-woman model is the basic model for patterns of dominance and submission which we characterize in the public sphere as tyranny. She demonstrates that the Führer and Il Duce are Husbands, violating without conscience nations of women. She insists that the Nazis and the Englishmen who despise them are a brotherhood with a shared appetite for illegitimate power — war games, uniforms, wealth, conquest: in a word, dominance. She says that to stop war men must change the behavior of *men*. In her analysis, humankind must destroy patriarchy itself.

It is no wonder then, that Keynes and other prominent Lefties of that time were angry. After all, a crucial part of the war dynamic is the conviction that there are good guys and bad guys. Woolf made clear that, in fact, there were bad guys and worse guys. Life under the bad guys was bad, and under the worse guys it would be worse.

The attitude of the Left has not changed very much since 1938. Sexism, it is true, is affixed with liberal good will onto the tail end of that imposing leftist litany: imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, racism, and, for the ladies, sexism. Woolf's original analysis and subsequent feminist analyses go, let us be polite, ignored, not assimilated, not acted upon.

The citizens of the male-dominated Left are still complicit in the institutions which oppress women, still accept the phallic identity of dominance (maleness) which demands, in order to continue to exist, submission (femaleness); still actively perpetuate the patriarchal forms of husband-wife, family headed by a father, church, and state; still demand privilege and confuse it with freedom. To the extent that the Left is committed to patriarchal forms, that is, to a very great extent, it cannot help but perpetuate the values it purports to oppose. To the extent that the Left is not consciously and conscientiously feminist, that is, to a very great extent, it cannot help but perpetuate the same forms of dominance and submission that it purports, in other areas, to oppose. To the extent that Leftists do not recognize the real dimension of their patriarchal alliances, that is, to a very great extent, they cannot help but perpetuate patriarchy, that system of male ownership which is the parent form of fascism.

As feminists, we must view the nonfeminist Left as a reform movement. We must marvel at its moral bankruptcy at the poverty of its revolutionary consciousness. Humankind is still, for that movement, mankind most literally. The Worker is still, or increasingly, a metaphor for phallic hero muscle, the center of the leftist preoccupation with images of virility. Women are ignored, or *patronized*. Liberal gestures of good will are made, when we are shrill enough or where we are fashionable enough, as long as we do not interfere with the "real revolution." Increasingly, we understand that we are the real revolution.

2. Patriarchy and Sexism

*Economy is the bone, politics is the flesh
watch who they beat and who they eat,
watch who they relieve themselves on,
watch who they own.
The rest is decoration.*

Marge Piercy

*[my nightmare] looks like a village lit
with blood/where all the fathers are crying:
My son is mine.*

Adrienne Rich

*Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands
for the husband is the head of
the wife, even as Christ is the head of the
Church.*

Ephesians 5:23-24

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Sexism is a new word, one which has been assimilated with remarkable ease into common usage. It is meant to refer to systematic cultural, political, and psychological prejudice against women. It denotes biological differentiation/inferiority, just as racism denotes racial differentiation/inferiority. It was coined so that we could refer to the general cultural, political, and psychological conviction that women are inferior to men, and that womanly or female, qualities (as a male-supremacist culture defines them) are inferior to manly, or male, qualities. Since in our culture homosexual men are associated with femaleness, or femininity—that is, in being penetrated they take on female stigma, the word “sexism” early on came to denote prejudice against homosexual men. In fact, the word is used so promiscuously that its meaning has become entirely vague: most often it denotes prejudice against a person on the basis of gender or sexual orientation, with no intrinsic reference to male supremacy or female inferiority. As a result, “I hate all men,” or “I hate all faggots,” or “Women? I guess they ought to exercise Pussy Power” are all in some sense sexist.

This wonderfully confuses things, and we can begin to understand why the word “sexism” is affixed without pain to the list of leftist no no’s. Properly manipulated, the word is meaningless because it no longer makes any reference to the actuality of *power*. Anyone can be against it, and not many are for it. One can be against it without changing one’s identity or behavior as the oppressor—which is, of course, what we mean when we talk disparagingly about liberals. Just as liberals are against racism but refuse to give up *power* which derives from their own white supremacy, so Leftists are against sexism but refuse to give up *power* which derives from their own male supremacy. How then do we separate the feminists from the boys?

Men are powerful and women are powerless because we live in a patriarchy. *Pater* means owner, possessor, or master. The basic social unit of patriarchy is the family. The word “family” comes from the Oscan *famel* which means servant, slave, or possession. *Pater familias* means “owner of slaves.” Common fathers and ordinary priests derive their authority as *paters*.

“Patriarchy” is the name of the political and cultural *system* which oppresses women. To be for the liberation of women is to be against patriarchy—no lesser commitment is a serious one. In a patriarchy all civil and religious authority (power) belongs by birthright to men. Patriarchy is a system of *ownership* wherein women and children are owned. *Patriarchy is the original authoritarian model, the molecular totalitarian model, and every tyrannical form is derived from it.* To be against tyranny and for freedom is to oppose, to resist, to refuse to be complicit in, patriarchal institutions. The destruction of the master-slave political scenario, however we describe it (capitalist-worker white-black, rich-poor etc.), requires the destruction of the source of that scenario—patriarchy. The destruction of the

psychologies and behaviors which we call dominant (master male) and submissive (slave, female), or aggressor-victim, demands the destruction of the source of those mental sets and behaviors—patriarchy. Ending forever the war of the powerful against the powerless—and ending the smaller wars of bad men against worse men—means dismantling the machinery of patriarchy.

Liberals, god bless them, are against sexism and for some measure of positive reform. They want the bad men to stop fighting worse men here and there; they want The Workers, men mostly, to control the means of production. Revolutionaries are out to destroy that system of oppression, the source of a million tyrannies, called patriarchy.

3. Patriarchy and Violence

I am the center of an atrocity.

Sylvia Plath

We are effectively destroying ourselves by violence masquerading as love.

R.D. Laing

We talked of the League of Nations and the prospects of peace and disarmament. On this subject he was not so much militarist as martial. The difficulty to which he could find no answer was that if permanent peace were ever achieved, and armies and navies ceased to exist, there would be no outlet for the manly qualities which fighting developed, and that human physique and human character would deteriorate.

from the biography of Anthony (Viscount Knebworth) by the Earl of Lytton

Violence is interwoven into the social fabric because it is the substance of sexuality as we know it. Dominance and submission, he and she. Aggression, conquest, and brutality are the defining masculine characteristics. War, feminists believe, is a function of masculine (phallic) identity. The vocabulary of war—aggression, conquest, dominance—is the vocabulary of “healthy” male virility. We talk of the rape of a country—and it is not an accident that when soldiers rape a country, they also rape its women. The Viet Nam genocide was characterized by massive, repeated attempts to defoliate the earth, Mother Nature herself. Nixon’s Christmas bombing message used language which was highly sexual and sexist. We know that these connections exist, and anyone who is concerned with violence and ending it as the substance of human relation must speak to them.

It is incredible to feminists that the notion of violence as a function of male sexual identity is not of pressing, burning concern to those who are against, they say, violence. How we ask, can one be against violence without being against the common, daily violence which defines male-female

relation? How can one be against war *there* and celebrate it *here*, on our bodies? Real opposition to violence would necessitate specific attention to crimes of violence against women. Wife-beating and general physical assault by men against women are endemic in Amerika as elsewhere. Wife-beating, in particular, is a crime which remains invisible, sanctioned by laws which give the husband authority over the wife. Violent rape is rife on city streets, epidemic; and it is also common in so-called private, personal relationships between men and women. Women are raped, and women are forced to prostitution, and women are assaulted, and acts of violence against women everywhere on every level are common, so common that they are not worthy of notice, so common that they are called "normal" and romanticized as love.

How is it possible, we ask, to act against war without acting against violence? And how is it possible to act against violence without acting against male violence against women? Feminists do not think that it is possible and yet when we look for those on the Left who oppose violence, they say, in our ranks, we do not find them.

4. The Means of Production and the Original Capital

We know that two evils clearly pre-date corporate capitalism, and have post-dated socialist revolutions: sexism and racism — so we know that a male-dominated socialist revolution in economic and even cultural terms, were it to occur tomorrow, would be no revolution, but only another coup d'etat among men.

Robin Morgan

I assure you I am not an enemy of women. I am very favourable to their employment as labourers or in other menial capacity.

an industrialist to Emily Davis,
who wanted help in funding
a school for women

In one world the sons of educated men work as civil servants, judges, soldiers, and are paid for that work; in the other world, the daughters of educated men work as wives, mothers, daughters — but are they not paid for that work? Is the work of a mother, of a wife, of a daughter, worth nothing to the nation in solid cash?

Virginia Woolf

The women say, shame on you. They say you are domesticated, forcibly fed, like geese in the yard of the farmer who fattens them. They say, you strut about, you have no other care than to enjoy the

good things your masters hand out, solicitous for your well-being so long as they stand to gain. They say, there is no more distressing spectacle than that of slaves who take pleasure in their servile state. They say, you are far from possessing the pride of those wild birds who refuse to hatch their eggs when they have been imprisoned. They say, take an example from the wild birds who, even if they mate with the males to relieve their boredom, refuse to reproduce so long as they are not at liberty.

Monique Wittig, *Les Guerilleres*

On the Left, bright young men are fond of saying that women will be liberated when workers control the means of production. It is very hard for us to explain, though it does seem perfectly obvious, that sexism is not a function of capitalism. Corporate or monopoly capitalism is this era's manifestation, sophisticated and virtually uncontrollable, of patriarchal ownership. Men owned women, women were capital; men owned women and the children that women produced; men owned women as wives, concubines, slaves, and whatever women produced, men owned. There was one man and he owned several women and their children and whatever they all produced. There was one man and he owned families who worked his land, and in those families women were owned first by the man who owned the families, then by the man who headed her particular family. He was the master, and master became his title, then a common form of address. Women were capital; later other commodities, then money, substituted for women occasionally, then more often. Today there is corporate capitalism in Amerika and state capitalism in Russia. When we look at the failure of the socialist revolution in Russia we see clearly the inability of patriarchs to give up the ownership of women. When that basic totalitarian form of ownership survives, wherever it survives, the whole motley gamut of totalitarian behavior survives with it.

When we look at the Left in Amerika here and now, what we see strikes terror in our hearts: mostly there is capitalism — the private ownership of women with token reform in the division of labor; where there is socialism, there is the collective male ownership of women, usually without even token reform in division of labor.

I am convinced, as I ponder why Leftists are so absolutely and blissfully stuck on the notion that freedom for all is when the workers control the means of production, that the Left has an almost pathological attachment to the mythic notion of The Worker as a figure of virility. There, think intellectuals, he is: driving trucks, laying bricks, building roads, working heavy equipment — a real man — The Working Man. Certainly it cannot be denied that he is the left-wing hero, and if we have learned anything it is to keep our distance from left-wing heroes.

How does one come to such a conclusion? I begin with the proposition that the means of production must be in the hands of the people; that freedom, dignity, and nonalienated work are the rights of all people. I look to those who articulate those propositions. But in fact, or in effect, they say: the means of production must be in the hands of men; work must stay in the hands of men; money must stay in the hands of men; freedom, dignity, and nonalienated work are the rights of men. They say: men have these rights and if there is anything left over — jobs, or money, or some excess freedom or dignity — we will parcel it out among the women. Needless to say, there is nothing left over, ever

We must consider here women who work, women who do not work, and "women's work." Women who work are underhired, underpaid, first fired, excluded from trade unions, not given promotions or raises or training, are discriminated against in every way. Let working men make these complaints and the Left is involved, concerned, yea, outraged — picket lines are joined, books are written. The fact that the Left is mute on the wretched situation of working women is not accidental. On the contrary, it is a manifestation of male alliance to protect male power and male privilege: *however poor men are, women must be poorer and thus dependent on male favor, in a state of economic, and therefore sexual, bondage.*

Many women do not work at all in the labor market, particularly poor women who are imprisoned by the welfare system, children, lack of marketable skills. Here the classic concern of the Left for the poor and unemployed vanishes — women are not thought of as poor or unemployed on their own; no, they are thought of as the wives of the poor and unemployed or they are not thought of at all.

What is most astounding is how left-wing economists totally ignore, *as if it did not exist*, so-called "women's work." Most women do domestic labor and are not paid for it. Most women do child rearing and are not paid for it. Women do slave labor, unrewarding, repetitive, involuntary, unskilled, unvalued, menial work that the poorest man will not do. Where are the left-wing writings on how women are the most viciously exploited labor force on the planet? We do not support capitalism (women's identity is not invested in capitalism), but we too must survive under it. To survive, we must be paid for the work we do.

That, of course, is not enough. Domestic work and child rearing are not women's work — we reject that precious birthright along with the bullshit male rhapsodies which sentimentalize it. Scrubbing floors and washing shit off babies and out of diapers are not functions of gender fate or identity, unless only women have hands.

Last, the Left, its economists, historians, and philosophers, have seemingly not yet noticed that we *are* the means of production. We are, in our bodies, the worker and the means of production. Never has there been such alienated labor. For us, control over our bodies is control over our lives. We

are deprived of that control by a system of laws, customs, and habits which exploits us so viciously and absolutely that the real exploitation of The Worker pales by comparison. Why, we must ask, is his situation crucial to you, and ours invisible? It could not be because The Worker is poorer, or more exploited, than, for instance, his wife who either works or does not work at paid labor, and in either case does domestic labor and child rearing for no money, and is herself the means of production. It must be that he is a real man, that working class hero. She, as ever, is only a real woman. Clearly, self-proclaimed Marxists and communists of all ideologies remain capitalists, bosses, and shameless exploiters until they develop serious feminist consciousness and commitment.

5. Feminism and Fucking

*"The only real love I have ever felt
was for children and other women.
Everything else was lust, pity,
self-hatred, pity, lust."
This is a woman's confession.
Now, look again at the face
of Botticelli's Venus, Kali,
the Judith of Chartres
with her so-called smile.*

Adrienne Rich

*Every act of becoming conscious
(it says here in this book)
is an unnatural act*

Adrienne Rich

*... I'm a lesbian, right? And I don't
have to love 'em, I don't have to fuck
'em, and I damn sure don't have to
depend on 'em, and that is freedom ...*

Shirley, from Phyllis Chesler's
Women and Madness

*The world was so recent that many
things lacked names, and in order to
indicate them it was necessary to point.*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez,
One Hundred Years of Solitude

Women's oppression, body and soul, takes place every day. It is the fabric of daily existence, unceasing, unrelenting, built into law, custom, and habit. Women survive by submitting, by learning the slave mentality and glorying in it. Women advance in this society by being *good* women (i.e., cunts, chicks, pieces of ass, etc.) just as blacks advance by being good niggers.

When one stops playing the slave's game, the world falls apart. Nothing is left. Nothing that one learned before works anymore. How does one walk, talk, dress, play, think, love, differently? Each minute, how and what does one do? The world becomes a very dangerous place. When one stops playing the slave's game, one must start to invent every minute

of one's life. There are no forms which already exist to show how, and there are no liberated communities where exemplary people lead exemplary lives. One lives on the edge of a personal world collapsed, in direct opposition to the whole world of reality and power, and what then can one do except invent?

The point here is that we do not have the luxury of being able to abstract our protests or resistances — we must live in our bodies and our bodies must live in patriarchy, subject to continuing violation, harassment, and contempt. There are no neutral areas — areas in which "sexism" does not matter. In particular, sex, the home, and "romance" are not neutral areas. Nothing is more political to a feminist than fucking — nothing is less an act of love and more an act of ownership, violation; nothing is less an instrument of ecstasy and more an instrument of oppression than the penis; nothing is less an expression of love and more an expression of dominance and control than conventional heterosexual relation. Here the war mentality makes a visitation on our bodies and the phallic values of aggression, dominance, and conquest are affirmed.

To transform the world we must transform the very substance of our erotic sensibilities and we must do so as consciously and as conscientiously as we do any act which involves our whole lives. There are two emerging feminist erotic models: lesbianism and androgyny. Lesbianism is a celebration of womanhood, the core erotic act in an emerging women's culture. Androgyny has to do with the obliteration of gender distinctions and sex roles, and ultimately of gender itself.

Both of these models must compel those who understand that systems of oppression are cancers which grow from and originate in the twisted sexual model, which is the patriarchal notion of normalcy, called dominance and submission. We say, oppression begins where life begins, in the act of fucking, and revolution must begin in the same place, or it has not begun at all.

6. Conclusion

There is only one choice. Call it freedom.

Marge Piercy

Grace Paley was telling me about her trip to Russia and she said —

anti-Jewishness is the pathology of Russia, and of the whole of Western Europe, just as anti-blackness is the pathology of Amerika, and being anti-woman is the pathology of the world.

The pathology of being anti-woman, or woman hating, is the warp and woof of the world. Cure it, and the world as we know it — its cruel and systematized oppression, the suffering of its wretched multitudes — must collapse. Cure it, and we transform human life and create human community. Continue to nurture that same pathology, to call it love and normalcy, and our history will be in the future what it has been in the past — Dachau, Hiroshima, Viet Nam; rape, sexual torture, women in chains.

Andrea Dworkin is the author of *Woman Hating* (Dutton, 1974) and *Our Blood* (Harper and Row, 1976).

Cover drawing by Janet McLaughlin.

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